



# SCHS Studies

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## Healthy Life Expectancy in North Carolina, 1996-2000

by

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### ABSTRACT

**Objectives:** Life tables have traditionally been used to estimate life expectancy at birth and at other ages. This study combines the life table methodology with measures of morbidity or ill health to calculate healthy life expectancy for the population of North Carolina.

**Methods:** We use 1996-2000 mortality data to calculate life expectancies for North Carolinians and then add 1993-2000 data from the Behavioral Risk Factor Surveillance System (BRFSS) to estimate, by age, average years of life remaining in good perceived health, in good physical health, in good mental health, and without activity limitation. These estimates are produced for the total population, males, females, whites, minorities, white males, white females, minority males, and minority females.

**Results:** The overall life expectancy at birth in North Carolina is 75.6 years. Females live longer than males and whites live longer than persons of minority race. The average life expectancy at birth is 73.8 years for white males, 79.6 years for white females, 68.0 years for minority males, and 75.8 years for minority females. The average years of healthy life remaining at birth (based on perceived health status) is 63.0. This means that 12.6 of the 75.6 years of life expectancy will be spent in a state where health status is perceived to be fair or poor. Females and minorities spend a higher number of their remaining years of life with perceived physical or mental health problems or some activity limitation. The average number of years from birth with health status perceived as fair or poor is 10.6 for white males, 13.0 for white females, 14.7 for minority males, and 16.5 for minority females.

**Conclusions:** Combining mortality and morbidity data provides a means of calculating healthy life expectancy. As the population of North Carolina ages, the burden of disease is likely to increase. The method presented here allows for regular updates of healthy life expectancy, using mortality and BRFSS data, which are collected each year at the state level.

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